

The calling of the Hebrews. And whether the Prophetic Gift was peculiar to the Hebrews

¶1 Each's true happiness and blessedness consists solely in the enjoyment of the good and not, in truth, in the glory that he—alone and with others excluded—enjoys as a good. For one who regards himself as more blessed on account of things going well for himself alone and not so well for others, or on account of his being more blessed and more fortunate than others, is ignorant of true happiness and blessedness; and the joy he conceives from it, if it is not childish, arises on the basis of no other thing than envy and a mean¹ spirit.

2 [2] For example, the true happiness and blessedness of a human being consists solely in wisdom and true² knowledge, and hardly in his being wiser than the rest or in the rest's lacking true knowledge. For this does not enlarge his wisdom—that is, his true happiness—in any way³ at all.

3 One who is glad on the latter account, accordingly, is glad at another's evil; and so he is envious and evil, and does not know wisdom or the tranquility of true life.

4 [3] Therefore, when Scripture says, to exhort the Hebrews to obedience to the law, that God has chosen them for himself in preference to the other nations (see Dt. 10:15), that he is close to them and not so close to others (Dt. 4:4, 7), that he has prescribed just laws only for them (4:8), and, finally, that he has become known to them alone to the neglect of the others (see 4:32), etc., it is only speaking to suit the grasp of those who—as we have shown in the previous Chapter³ {45} and as Moses attests as well (see Dt. 9:6-7)—did not recognize true blessedness. [4] For surely they would not have been less blessed if God had called everyone to salvation equally. And God would have been no less propitious to them even though he had been equally propitious to the others, nor the laws less just, or they themselves less wise, even if they had been prescribed to everyone; nor would miracles have shown God's power less if they had been made for the other nations as well. Nor, finally, would the Hebrews be less bound to worship God if God had bestowed all these gifts equally on everyone.

5 [5] That God says to Solomon, moreover, that no one in the future after him will be as wise as he (see I Ki. 3:12) seems to be only a mode of speaking for signifying extreme wisdom. Whatever it may be, it is hardly to be believed that God promised Solomon, for his greater happiness, not to bestow such wisdom on anyone afterward.

¹ Lit.: evil.

² Reading *vera* for *veri*. Otherwise: knowledge of the true.

³ See 2.9.22-26.

For this would in no way[°] enlarge Solomon's understanding; and a prudent King would not give fewer thanks for such a gift even if God had said that he would grant the same wisdom to all.

¶2 [6] Be that as it may, even if we said that, in the passages of the Pentateuch just cited, Moses spoke to suit the grasp of the Hebrews, we still do not mean to deny that God prescribed those laws of the Pentateuch for them alone, nor that he spoke only to them, nor, finally, that the Hebrews saw such wonders as happened to no other nation. But we mean only that Moses meant to admonish the Hebrews in such a mode, and especially with such reasons, as to bind them more to the worship of God on the basis of their childish grasp. Furthermore, we have meant to show that the Hebrews did not excel the other nations in science, nor in piety, but plainly in something else. Or (if, with Scripture, I might speak to suit their grasp) the Hebrews were not chosen by God in preference to the others for true life and grand theorizings, however often they had been admonished, but plainly for something else. What it was, moreover, I will show here in order.

¶3 [7] But before I begin, I want in the following to explain in a few words[°] what I understand by God's direction, God's external and internal help, God's choosing, and, finally, fortune.

2 By God's direction, I understand that fixed and unchangeable order of nature, or the chaining together of natural things. {46} [8] For we have said above,⁴ and we have already shown in another place,⁵ that the universal laws of nature, in accordance with which everything comes to be and is determined, are nothing but God's eternal decrees, which always involve eternal truth and necessity.

3 Accordingly, whether we say that everything comes to be in accordance with the laws of nature, or that everything is ordered on the basis of God's decree and direction, we are saying the same thing.

4 [9] Furthermore, since the power of all natural things is nothing but God's power itself, through which alone everything comes to be and is determined, hence it follows that whatever a human being—who is part of nature as well—prepares for himself as a help for preserving his being, or whatever nature offers him while he does⁶ nothing, is all offered to him by divine power alone, insofar as it acts either through human nature or through things outside human nature.

5 Accordingly, whatever human nature can guarantee out of its own power alone for preserving its being, we can deservedly call God's internal help, and whatever turns out to be useful to it on the basis of the power of external causes besides, God's external help.

6 [10] Yet on the basis of these things, what is to be understood by God's choosing is easily gathered as well. For since no one does anything except on the basis of the predetermined order of nature—that is, on the basis of God's eternal direction and decree—hence it follows that no one chooses for himself any plan of living, nor puts any into effect, unless on the basis of a special calling of God, who chooses this

⁴ Cf. 1.22.6, 2.9.8.

⁵ See Spinoza, *Ethics* Pt. I, Props. 16-17, 29 (trans. White, 55-58, 65f.).

⁶ Lit.: operates.

individual⁷ for this work or for this plan of living in preference to others.

7 [11] Finally, by fortune I understand nothing else but God's direction insofar as he⁷ directs human affairs through external and unexpected causes.

8 These things being foretasted, let us return to our intent, so that we may see what it was on account of which the Hebrew nation was said to have been chosen by God in preference to the rest.

9 To show this, I proceed as follows.

¶4 [12] Everything that we long for honorably is related mainly to these three things: namely, understanding things through their first causes, mastering the passions or acquiring the habit of virtue, and, finally, living securely and with a sound body.

2 The means that directly serve the first and the second, and which can be considered as proximate and efficient causes, are contained in human nature itself—so that their acquisition depends chiefly on our power alone, or on the laws of human nature alone. And because of this, it is altogether to be stated that these gifts have been peculiar to no nation {47} but are common to the whole human race—unless we wanted to dream that nature long ago procreated different kinds⁸ of human beings.

3 [13] Yet the means that serve for living securely and preserving the body lie chiefly in external things. And therefore they are called gifts of fortune, no doubt since they depend mostly on the direction of external causes of which we are ignorant. So that, in this matter, the foolish may be more or less equally as happy or unhappy as the prudent.

4 Still, for living securely and avoiding the wrongs of other human beings and even of beasts, human direction and vigilance can help much.

5 [14] For this, reason and experience teach no more certain means than to form a society with certain laws and occupy a certain area of the world and channel everyone's strength into one body as it were, namely, that of society. Be that as it may, for forming and preserving a society, no mediocre intelligence and vigilance is required. And therefore that society will be more secure, more steadfast and less vulnerable to fortune, which is founded⁹ and directed to the greatest extent by prudent and vigilant human beings. And on the other hand, one that consists of human beings of a crude mental cast¹⁰ depends for the most part on fortune and is less steadfast.

6 [15] That it would still last long is due to another's direction, not its own. Indeed, if it overcame great dangers and matters succeeded favorably for it, it will be unable not to admire and adore God's direction (namely, insofar as God acts through hidden external causes and not through human nature and the mind), inasmuch as nothing happened to it but what was quite unexpected and contrary to opinion. Really, this can even be considered as a miracle.

¶5 [16] Only through this, therefore, are nations distinguished from one another: namely, by reason of the society and the laws under which they live and are directed. And so the Hebrew nation was chosen by God in preference to the others not by

⁷ Or: it.

⁸ Or: races (as in the preceding clause).

⁹ Elsewhere: based.

¹⁰ Or: intelligence (as earlier in 3.4.5). See Glossary, s.v. "mental cast."

reason of their understanding, nor by their tranquility of spirit, but by reason of their society, and fortune, by which they acquired an imperium and kept that same one for so many years.

2 [17] This is also very clearly established from Scripture itself. For if anyone runs through it even superficially, he sees clearly that the Hebrews excelled other nations in this alone: they managed those of their affairs that pertain to the security of life happily and overcame great perils, and did so mostly by God's external help alone—whereas in the rest of their affairs {48} they were equal to the others and God was equally propitious to all.

3 [18] For it is established by reason of their understanding (as we have shown in the previous Chapter)¹¹ that they had rather vulgar thoughts about God and nature. Therefore, they were not chosen by God in preference to others by reason of their understanding—and not by reason of their virtue and true life either. For in this matter they were also equal to the rest of the Peoples; and only very few were chosen. [19] The choosing and calling of them, therefore, consisted solely in the temporal happiness and advantages of their imperium. Nor do we see that God promised the Patriarchs¹² or their successors anything else besides this. Indeed, nothing else is promised in the Law in return for obedience but the continued happiness of the imperium and the rest of the advantages of this life; and in return for stubbornness, on the other hand, the breaking of the compact, the ruin of the imperium, and the greatest disadvantages.

4 [20] Nor is it a wonder. For the aim of society as such and of an imperium (as is obvious on the basis of what has just been said and as we will show more extensively in the following) is to live securely and advantageously. An imperium cannot subsist, however, except with Laws by which each is bound. For if all the members of one society wanted to say farewell to the laws, by the same token they would dissolve the society and destroy the imperium.

5 [21] Nothing else could be promised to the Hebrews' society in return for steadfast observance of the laws, therefore, but the security of life¹³ and its advantages; and, on the other hand, no more certain comeuppance could be predicted in return for stubbornness than the ruin of the imperium and the evils that commonly follow from it, and other things besides, which would arise for them in particular from the ruin of their specific imperium. But there is no need at present to deal with these things at more length.

6 [22] I only add this: the laws of the Old Testament as well were only revealed and prescribed to the Jews. For, since God only chose them to constitute a specific society and imperium, they necessarily had to have specific Laws as well. Whether indeed God also prescribed laws peculiar to other nations and revealed himself prophetically to their Lawgivers—namely, under those attributes by which they were used to imagining God—is not sufficiently established for me. This, at least, is obvious from Scripture: other nations as well had an imperium and specific laws with God's external help. [23]

¹¹ See 2.8.1-10.2.

¹² "Cf. Annotation 4." Spinoza's note.

¹³ "Cf. Annotation 5." Spinoza's note.

To show this, I will only bring up two passages of Scripture.

7 In Genesis 14:18-20, it is narrated that Melchizedek was king of Jerusalem and a pontiff of the highest God, {49} and that he blessed Abraham, as was the Pontiff's right (see Num. 6:23), and, finally, that Abraham, being cherished by God, gave a tenth part of all the spoils to this pontiff of God.

8 [24] All these things show sufficiently that, before God founded the Israelite People, he constituted kings and pontiffs in Jerusalem and prescribed rites and laws for them. Whether, in truth, he did so prophetically is, as we have said,¹⁴ not sufficiently established for me.

9 At least I persuade myself of this: while Abraham lived there, he lived in accordance with those laws religiously. For Abraham did not receive any rites in particular from God, and nevertheless it is said in Genesis 26:5 that Abraham observed the worship, precepts, institutions and Laws of God: this, without doubt, is to be understood as being about the worship, precepts, institutions and laws of King Melchizedek.

10 [25] Malachi 1:10-11 criticizes the Jews with these words: **מי גם בכם ויסגור דלתיהם ולא תארו חום אין לי חפץ בכם וגוו: כי ממזורה שמש ונעד מבואו גדולשמי בגוים ובכל מקום מוקטר מוגש לשמי ומנחה טהורה כי גדולשמי בגוים אמר יהוה צבאות** *Who is there among you to close the gates (of the temple), lest a fire be imposed in vain on my altar. I have no delight in you, etc. For from the rising of the sun to its setting, my name is great among the peoples, and incense and a pure offering are brought to me everywhere. For my name is great among the peoples, says the God of hosts.* Since no other time can be allowed to these words than the present, unless we want to do violence¹⁵ to them, surely they attest more than sufficiently that the Jews were no more cherished by God at that time than other Nations. Indeed, God became known more to other Nations by miracles than to the Jews of that time, who by then, without miracles, had in part acquired an imperium once more. Furthermore, the Nations had rites and ceremonies by which they were accepted by God.

11 [26] But I dismiss these things; for it is sufficient for my intent to have shown that the choosing of the Jews had to do with nothing else but the temporal happiness of the body and with freedom, or with the imperium, and the mode and means by which they acquired it; and, consequently, with the Laws as well, insofar as they were necessary for stabilizing that specific imperium; and, finally, with the mode in which the Laws were revealed. In the other things in which a human being's true happiness consists, however, the Jews were equal to the rest.

12 [27] Accordingly, when it is said in Scripture that no Nation has Gods equally as close to them {50} as the Jews have God (see Dt. 4:7), it is to be understood only by reason of their imperium, and solely concerning that time when so many miracles happened for them, etc.

13 For, by reason of their understanding and virtue, that is, by reason of their blessedness, God, as we have already said and as we have shown by reason itself,¹⁶ is

¹⁴ See 3.5.6.

¹⁵ Lit.: bring force.

¹⁶ See 3.5.3, with 2.8.1-10.2.

equally propitious to all: this is sufficiently established from Scripture itself. [28] For the Psalmist says in Psalm 145:18, קָרוֹב יְהוָה לְכָל קְרוֹאָיו לְכָל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָאָהוּ בָּאָמֶת God is close to all who call on him, to all who call on him truly.

14 Likewise, in verse 9 of the same Psalm, God is gentle to all, and his mercy (is) toward everything he has made.

15 In Psalm 33:15, it is clearly said that God has given the same understanding to all—in these words, *הַיּוֹצֵר יְחִידָה לְבָם* who forms their heart in the same mode.

16 For the heart was believed by the Hebrews to be the seat of the soul and of the understanding, which I figure is sufficiently recognized by all.

17 [29] Furthermore, it is established from Job 28:28 that God prescribed this Law to the whole human race: to revere God and to abstain from evil works, or to act well; and therefore Job, although a gentile, was to God the most acceptable of all, since he surpassed everyone in piety and religion.

18 Finally, it is very clearly established from Jonah 4:2 that God is propitious, merciful, longsuffering, full of gentleness and repentant of evil. For Jonah says, *Therefore I stated before that I would flee to Tarsus, since I knew* (namely, from the words of Moses' which are found¹⁷ in Ex. 34:6) *that you were a propitious, merciful, etc., God*, and so were about to pardon the gentiles of Nineveh.

19 [30] We therefore conclude (since God is equally propitious to all, and the Hebrews were chosen by God only by reason of their society and imperium) that no Jew, when considered alone outside the society and the imperium, had any gift of God above others, and there was no distinction between himself and a gentile.

20 [31] Since it is accordingly true that God is equally gentle, merciful, etc., to all, and the duty of a Prophet was not to teach the laws peculiar to the fatherland so much as true virtue and to admonish human beings concerning it, there is no doubt that all nations had Prophets and that the Prophetic gift was not peculiar to the Jews.

21 Really, both the profane and the sacred histories¹⁷ attest to this as well. And although it is not established on the basis of the sacred histories of the Old Testament that other Nations {51} had as many Prophets as the Hebrews, nor indeed that any gentile Prophet was expressly sent by God to the nations, it is in no way¹⁸ relevant; for the Hebrews cared to write only of their own affairs, not other peoples'.

22 [32] It is accordingly sufficient that we find in the Old Testament that human beings prophesied who were gentiles and uncircumcised, such as Noah, Enoch, Abimelech, Balaam and others. Furthermore, the Hebrew Prophets were sent by God not only to their own, but to many other nations as well.

23 For Ezekiel prognosticated to all the peoples then recognized. Indeed, Obadiah did to none others that we know of except the Edomites,¹⁸ and Jonah was prognosticator chiefly to the Ninevites.¹⁹

24 [33] Isaiah not only lamented and predicted the calamities of the Jews and sang of their restoration, but did so of other peoples as well. For he says in 16:9 **עַל כָּן**

¹⁷ Or: stories. Likewise later in 3.5.21.

¹⁸ Ob. 1:1-21.

¹⁹ Jon. 1:1, 3:1-4.

אַבְכָה בְּבַכִּי יְעֹזֵר *Therefore, I will mourn Jazer with weeping;* and in chapter 19 he first predicts the calamities of the Egyptians, and afterward their restoration (see vss. 19-21, 25).

25 Namely, that God would send them a Savior to free them and that God would become known to them and, finally, that the Egyptians would worship God with sacrifices and gifts; and at last he calls this nation *blessèd Egypt, God's populace.* All of this, in fact, is rather worth being noted.

26 [34] Jeremiah, finally, is called a Prophet not only of the Hebrew people, but of the peoples absolutely (see Jer. 1:5). Here he weeps when predicting the calamities of the nations as well, and predicts their restoration. For at 48:31 he says of the Moabites, *עַל כֵּן עַל מוֹאָב אִילִיל וְלִמוֹאָב כֹּלָה אֹזֶעַK* *Therefore, I will bewail on account of Moab, and I cry out on account of the whole of Moab.* And in verse 36, *עַל כֵּן לְבִי לְמוֹאָב כְּחֶלְמִים יְהֹמָה* *Therefore, my heart beats like a drum on account of Moab.* And at last he predicts their restoration, even as he predicts the restoration of the Egyptians, the Ammonites and the Elamites as well.²⁰

27 [35] Therefore, there is no doubt that the other peoples as well as the Jews had their Prophets, who prophesied to them and to the Jews.

28 Yet although Scripture only makes mention of one, Balaam, to whom the future affairs of the Jews and of other nations were revealed, still it is not to be believed that Balaam prophesied on that occasion alone. For it is very clearly established on the basis of the history²¹ itself that he was renowned well beforehand for his prophecy and other divine gifts.

29 For when Balak bids summoning him, he says (Num. 22:6), {52} *כִּי יִדְעַת אֶת אֶת* *אֲשֶׁר תִּבְרֹךְ יְבוֹרֵךְ וְאֲשֶׁר תֹּאַרְךְ יְאַרְךְ* *since I know that he whom you have blessed is blessed and he whom you have cursed is cursed.*

30 Therefore, he had that same virtue that was bestowed on Abraham (see Gen. 12:3).

31 [36] Furthermore, as he was accustomed to in Prophecies, Balaam replies to the messengers to wait for him while God's will is being revealed to him.

32 When he prophesied—that is, when he interpreted God's true mind—he was used to saying this of himself *נִאמֵם שׁוֹמֵעַ אָמְרֵי אֶל וַיַּדְעַ דַעַת עֲלֵינוֹ מִזְהָזָה שְׁדֵי יְחִזָּה* *The saying of him who hears the sayings of God and knows the science (or the mind and foreknowledge) of the exalted; he sees the vision of the omnipotent, swooning but with eyes opened.*²²

33 Finally, after he blessed the Hebrews by God's command (as he was used to doing, no doubt), he began to prophesy to other peoples and predict their future affairs.

34 [37] All this indicates more than sufficiently that he had always been a Prophet, or prophesied very often, and (what is to be noted here in addition) had what especially rendered Prophets certain of the truth of the prophecy: namely, a spirit inclined solely

²⁰ Jer. 48:47 (Moabites), 46:26 (Egyptians), 49:6 (Ammonites), 49:39 (Elamites).

²¹ Or: story.

²² Num. 24:16.

to the equitable and the good. For he did not bless whom he wanted or curse whom he wanted, as Balak deemed, but only those whom God wanted to be blessed or cursed. Therefore he answered Balak: *Even if Balak gives me as much silver and gold as could fill his house, I will not be able to transgress God's edict and do good or evil on the basis of my own decision. I will speak what God speaks.*²³ [38] As for God's being angry with him while he was en route, it happened to Moses as well while he was setting out for Egypt by God's command (see Ex. 4:24); and as for his accepting money for prophesying, Samuel did the same (see I Sam. 9:7-8); and if he sinned in any matter (see II Pet. 2:15-16 and Jude 11 about this), *Nobody is so equitable as to act well always and never sin* (see Eccles. 7:20).

35 And surely his speeches always had to be worth much with God, and the force of his cursing was certainly rather great, since the fact that God did not want to hear Balaam and turned his curse into a blessing is often mentioned in Scripture as attesting to God's great mercy toward the Israelites (see Dt. 23:6, Josh. 24:10, Neh. 13:2). Therefore, he was without a doubt very acceptable to God. For the speeches {53} and curses of the impious hardly move God.

36 [39] Accordingly, since he was a true Prophet and yet was called by Joshua (13:22) קומם a diviner or an augur, it is certain that this term is also taken in a good sense;²⁴ and those whom the gentiles were used to calling augurs and diviners were true Prophets, and those whom Scripture often accuses and condemns were Pseudo-diviners, who deceived peoples just as the Pseudo-prophets did the Jews: this is also established sufficiently clearly on the basis of other passages of Scripture.²⁵ Therefore, we conclude that the Prophetic gift was not peculiar to the Jews, but common to all nations.

37 [40] Still, on the other hand, the Pharisees²⁶ bitterly contend that this divine gift was peculiar to their nation only, whereas the other nations predicted future matters by I don't know what diabolical virtue. (What won't superstition ultimately fantasize!)

38 The chief thing they bring up from the Old Testament, for confirming this opinion by its authority, is Exodus 33:16, where Moses says to God and בבמה יודע אפה in Hebrew For by what reality may it be recognized that I and your populace have discovered grace in your eyes? Certainly when you go with us, and we will be separated, I and your populace, from every populace that is on the surface of the earth. [41] Here, I say, they want to infer that Moses asked God to be present to the Jews and reveal himself to them prophetically, and furthermore not to grant this grace to any other nation.

39 It is ridiculous, surely, that Moses would envy God's presence to peoples, or dare to ask such a thing from God.

40 But the reality is that after Moses noted that the mental cast and spirit of his nation were stubborn, he clearly saw that, without very great miracles and God's

²³ Num. 24:13.

²⁴ Lit.: part.

²⁵ E.g., I Ki. 18:17-39, 22:5-38, Jer. 28:1-17, 29:8-9.

²⁶ E.g., Rashi on Ex. 33:16.

special external help, they could not complete the matters that had been begun. Indeed, they would necessarily have perished without such help. And so he sought this special external help of God's, so that it might be established that God wanted them to be preserved.

41 For thus he says at 34:9, *If I have discovered grace in your eyes, Lord, let, I pray, God go among us, since this is a stubborn populace, etc.*

42 [42] The reason why he asks for the special external help of God's, therefore, is that the populace were stubborn; and what in addition shows more clearly that Moses did not ask for anything besides this special external help of God's is God's very reply. For he replied at once (34:10), *Behold, I am making a compact; before your whole populace, I will make wonders {54} that have not been made in the whole earth, nor in all the peoples, etc.*

43 Therefore, Moses here is dealing solely with the choosing of the Hebrews as I have explained it,²⁷ and was not seeking anything else from God.

44 [43] And yet in Paul's Epistle to the Romans, I find another text that moves me more: namely, 3:1-2, where Paul seems to teach something else than we do here. For he says, *What therefore is the preëminence of the Jew? Or what is the utility of circumcision? It is much in every mode. For the primary thing is that to him were entrusted the oracles of God.*

45 But if we paid attention to the teaching of Paul's which he means to teach especially, we will not discover anything that conflicts with this teaching of ours; but on the contrary, he teaches the same thing as we do here. For he says, in verse 29 of the same chapter, that God is the God of both the Jews and the nations; and in 2:25-26, *If a circumcised thing were to recoil from the law, the circumcision would be made a foreskin; and on the other hand, if a foreskin were to observe the command of the law, its foreskin would be thought circumcision.*

46 [44] Furthermore, in 3:9 and 4:15 he says that all were equally under sin—Jews and gentiles. Sin, however, does not exist²⁸ without commandment and law.

47 Therefore, it is very evidently established here that the law under which all lived was revealed to absolutely all (which we have shown above from Job 28:28 as well):²⁹ namely, the law that has to do with true virtue alone, and not the one that is stabilized on the basis of the plan and constitution of some specific imperium and is accommodated to the mental cast of one nation.

48 [45] Finally, Paul concludes³⁰ that, since God is the God of all nations, that is, is equally propitious to all, and all were equally under the law and sin, therefore God sent his Christ to all nations, to free all equally from the slavery of the law, so that they might no longer act well by the command of the Law, but by a steadfast decree of the spirit.

49 Accordingly, Paul teaches precisely³¹ what we mean.

²⁷ See 3.3.6, 5.1-19.

²⁸ Lit: is not given.

²⁹ See 3.5.17.

³⁰ Rom. 3:21-30.

³¹ More or less lit.: to suit the carpenter's measuring-stick. (See C. T. Lewis, *A Latin Dictionary* [Oxford: Clarendon

50 [46] When, therefore, he says, *God's oracles were trusted only to the Jews*,³² either it is to be understood that only to them were the Laws entrusted in writing, whereas they were entrusted^o to the rest of the peoples by revelation and in concept alone; or it is to be said (since he is eager to rebut what the Jews alone could have objected) that Paul is responding on the basis of the grasp and in accordance with the accepted opinions of the Jews at that time. For, to teach what he had partly seen, partly heard, he was a Greek with the Greeks and a Jew with the Jews.³³

51 [47] It is now left for us only to reply to the reasons of some, {55} by which they want to persuade themselves that the choosing of the Hebrews was not temporal and by reason of their imperium alone, but eternal. For, they say, we see that after the loss of their imperium the Jews are survivors, scattered everywhere for so many years and separated from all nations; that this has happened to no other Nation; furthermore, that Sacred Writ seems to teach in many passages that God chose the Jews for himself for eternity; and therefore, even though the imperium has perished, nevertheless they still remain God's chosen.

52 [48] The passages that they deem to teach this eternal choosing as clearly as possible are chiefly, first, Jeremiah 31:36, where the Prophet testifies that the seed of Israel will remain God's people for eternity, no doubt by comparing them with the fixed order of the heavens and of nature.³⁴

53 Second, Ezekiel 20:32, etc.,³⁵ where he seems to mean that, although the Jews intentionally said farewell to the worship of God, God will still gather them back from all the regions in which they had been dispersed and will lead them to the desert of the populaces,³⁶ just as he led their parents to the deserts of Egypt, and ultimately from there—after he has culled them from the rebels and the backsliders—to the mountain of his holiness, where the whole family of Israel will worship him.

54 [49] Other passages are usually brought up besides these, especially by the Pharisees; but I deem that I will satisfy everyone when I reply to these two. This I will make a speedy business of, after I show from Scripture itself that God chose the Hebrews not for eternity, but only on the same condition that he chose the Canaanites before, who, as we have shown above,³⁷ also had pontiffs who worshiped God religiously and whom God still rejected on account of their luxury and sloth and evil worship.

55 [50] For Moses, in Leviticus 18:27-28, admonishes the Israelites not to be polluted with incest like the Canaanites, lest the earth vomit them out, just as it vomited out those peoples who inhabited those places.

56 And in Deuteronomy 8:19-20, he threatens total ruin with the same, very express words.

Press, 1879], s.v. *adamussin*.) Elsewhere Spinoza uses *praeclive*.

³² Spinoza rephrases the text of Rom. 3:2 as quoted in 3.5.44. In the new phrasing, the text could also mean, *God's oracles were believed only by dint of the Jews*.

³³ I Cor. 9:20.

³⁴ Jer. 31:35, 37.

³⁵ Ezek. 20:32-40.

³⁶ See, for this expression, Ezek. 20:35.

³⁷ See 3.5.7-9.

העדותי בכם היום כי אבד תאבדו נגויים אשר יהוה מאבדיך 57 For thus he says, *אבד תאבדו נגויים אשר יהוה מאבדיך* I attest to you today that you will absolutely perish, just like the peoples whom God has made to perish from your presence; thus you will perish.

58 And other passages³⁸ in this mode are found in the Law which expressly indicate that God did not choose the Hebrew nation absolutely or for eternity.

59 [51] If, accordingly, the Prophets predicted a new and eternal covenant of the knowledge, love, and grace of God, it is easily proved that it was only promised to the pious. {56} For in the same chapter of Ezekiel which we have just cited,³⁹ he expressly says that he will separate the rebels and the backsliders from them; and in Zephaniah 3:12-13, that God would take away the proud from their midst⁴⁰ and make the poor the survivors; and since this choosing has to do with true virtue, it is not to be deemed that it was only promised to the pious of the Jews, with the others excluded; but, plainly, it is to be believed that the true gentile Prophets, whom we have shown all nations to have had,⁴¹ also promised the same to the faithful of their Nations and consoled them by it.

60 [52] Why this eternal covenant of the knowledge and love of God is universal, is also very evidently established from Zephaniah 3:10-11, and so no difference is to be admitted in this matter between the Jews and the nations; nor, therefore, is there also another choosing peculiar to them, beyond that which we have already shown.

61 And there is the fact that, while concerning this choosing, which has to do with true virtue alone, the Prophets mixed in many things about sacrifices and other ceremonies and the rebuilding of the Temple and the City,⁴² they wanted to explain spiritual matters in conformity⁴³ with⁴⁴ the mode and nature of prophecy, under such figures as would at the same time indicate to the Jews—whose Prophets they were—that the restoration of the imperium and the Temple was to be expected at the time of Cyrus.

62 [53] Therefore, Jews today have nothing further which they can attribute to themselves above all Nations.

63 That they have persisted for so many years, dispersed without an imperium, is hardly a wonder, after they so separated themselves from all nations as to turn the hatred of all against themselves—not only by their external rites, which are contrary to the rites of the other nations, but also by the sign of circumcision, which they keep religiously.⁴⁵

64 That the hatred of the Nations preserves them considerably, however, experience has already taught.

³⁸ See 3.5.53.

³⁹ This expression has already occurred at 1.20. *15* with the Latin possessive explicit. From now on, Spinoza uses it idiomatically with the possessive merely implicit. Except at 17.5.21, it will always be translated with the appropriate possessive interpolated, as here, or else as "in [or into] evidence," depending on the context.

⁴⁰ See 3.5.26-36.

⁴¹ I.e., Jerusalem.

⁴² Elsewhere: in proportion to.

⁴³ Cf. Tacitus, *Histories* V.5.

65 [54] When the King of Spain⁴⁴ once compelled the Jews to adopt the Religion of the Kingdom or go into exile, most Jews adopted the Religion of the pontiffs.⁴⁵ But since all the privileges of natural Spaniards were granted to those who adopted the religion, and they were figured to be entitled to all honors, they at once mixed with the Spaniards, so that after a short time no traces or memory of them remained.

66 Now plainly the opposite happened to those whom the King of the Portuguese⁴⁶ compelled to convert to the religion of his imperium. Though converted to the religion, they always lived separate from everyone, no doubt since he declared them {57} not entitled to any honors.

67 [55] I figure the sign of circumcision can also be so important⁴⁷ in this matter as well, that I persuade myself that this one thing will preserve this Nation for eternity: indeed, I would absolutely believe that, unless the foundations of their religion were to make their spirits effeminate, they will someday, given the occasion⁴⁸—as human affairs are changeable—erect their imperium once more, and God will choose them anew.

68 [56] We have a splendid example of this matter as well in the Chinese, who even keep a pigtail on their head very religiously, by which they separate themselves from all others; and, thus separated, they have preserved themselves for so many years that they far surpass in antiquity all the rest of the nations. They did not always hold onto their imperium; and yet they recovered it when it was lost, and without a doubt they will recover it again, when the spirits of the Tartars⁴⁹ begin to languish in the face of extravagant riches⁵⁰ and sloth.

69 [57] Finally, if someone wanted to defend the Jews' having been chosen by God for eternity from this or some other cause, I will not conflict with him, provided that he state that this choosing, whether temporal or eternal, insofar as it is peculiar only to the Jews has to do only with the imperium and the advantages of the body (since this alone can distinguish one Nation from another); yet by reason of understanding and true virtue, no nation is distinguished from another; and so, in these matters, none is chosen by God in preference to others.

⁴⁴ Ferdinand of Aragon, in 1492.

⁴⁵ I.e., Roman Catholicism.

⁴⁶ Manuel I, in 1496.

⁴⁷ Lit.: so much.

⁴⁸ More or less lit.: the occasion being given.

⁴⁹ "Historical error: the pigtail was on the contrary imposed on the Chinese by the Manchou dynasty in 1644. It is this dynasty that Spinoza designates by the name 'Tartar' (originally utilized for the peoples who composed the armies of Ghengis Khan)." Akkerman's note *ad loc.*, 722, n. 47.

⁵⁰ Lit.: the extravagance of riches.